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The Temptation and Victory of Buddha

Sculpture from Gandhara, 1st to 5th Century A. D.

The Gāndhāra Sculptures.

THE Museum has recently received several specimens of Gāndhāra sculpture, six fragments in all, four as a gift and two as a loan. It is hoped shortly to place them on exhibition, and they may be seen meanwhile on application at the office of the Chinese and Japanese Department. These pieces, though of crude workmanship, and more or less damaged, are of interest on account of the glimpse they give into fields of thought and feeling little understood by us.

Gāndhāra is the Hindu name of the ancient land in the extreme northwest of India, spoken of by Herodotus (Bk. VII C 65 and 66) as the land of the Gandarioi. Gautama, the Buddha, died one hundred and fifty years before Alexander the Great invaded India in 326 B. C. From 263 B. C. to 221 B. C., Asoka, the first important king to accept the Buddhist faith, reigned in Central India. His subjects followed his example, and the religion spread with rapidity, emissaries being sent to preach Buddhism in neighboring lands, Gāndhāra, Kashmir, and Ceylon, in B. C. 242.

Some authorities think that they can trace in the earliest Indian art elements suggestive of Greek, Assyrian, and Persian influence. Others think it pure Hindu. It arose during Asoka's time; and, judging by the remains that we know, probably culminated in the famous gateway of the stūpa at Sanchi about 140 B. C. In this art the Indian sculptor did not often use purely geometrical design. He preferred to fill his space with birds and flowers.

His style was influenced by the original wood carving that preceded the work in stone. The human figure was preposterously represented as an object on which masses of ornament could be hung, for the Hindus lacked any accurate knowledge of anatomy. These early reliefs were flat and low in their modelling.

The sculptures which go by the general name of "Gāndhāra," but which are not found within that territory alone, came later, and appear to have had little or no connection with the older form. They probably date from the first five centuries of the Christian era. The present specimens do not show striking proof of Greek workmanship; but among the numerous pieces of the same type in Calcutta, Lahore, London, Berlin, and other museums, there are those which show convincing proofs of Greek and Roman influence. Moreover, there is a strong resemblance in style between the Gāndhāra sculptures and the early Christian reliefs in the Lateran Museum. During the centuries in which both were produced, the greatness of Greek art was quite gone, and it is well known that artists wandered far from Greece in search of work, and that they appeared in Rome and in Gāndhāra. Early Christianity and the purer forms of Buddhism have so many points in common that it is not surprising to find the fragments preserved in the catacombs not unlike the upper Indian sculptures; particularly since we know that Greeks, or artists imbued with Greek tradition, were working in Rome and India at the same time.

The result of the religious influence in both cases is an art sincere and noble in feeling; in expression

crude. We find usually somewhat stiff figures with roughly cut draperies and huge heads on short bodies (the proportion of the head to the body varying from four and one-fourth heads upwards). The Greek types were well adapted to the new purposes. Hermes the Ram-bearer (Kriophoros) served as a type for the Good Shepherd of the Christians, and also served the Indians in another capacity. Apollo, it is thought, served for Buddha; Zeus for the Vajrapâni, the ruler of the upper air, and hurler of the thunderbolt; and Eros, Nike, and others for still other purposes. The nimbus, the Corinthian capital, and other such decorations used in Greece in Alexander's time, seem to have come to Gândhâra with the Greeks.

In the art of King Asoka's reign Buddha himself was never represented, just as in early Christian days Christ was represented only by a symbol, such as an anchor, a fish, or the figure of the Good Shepherd with the lamb. But in the Gândhâra sculptures Buddha is shown; and the artists devote themselves to representing scenes from his life, much as the life of Christ was depicted by the Christians of the same day.

The two most important reliefs owned by the Museum represent, first, the temptation and victory of Buddha under the Bodhi tree, and, second, his death or achievement of final Nirvana. In both of these Buddha is represented as of much greater size than the surrounding figures, in the same way

that in Byzantine painting Christ is usually shown as of extraordinary stature.

In the Temptation scene Buddha is represented under the Bodhi tree attacked by the army of demons and tempters.

"When the future Buddha turned his back to the trunk of the Bo tree and faced the east, and made the mighty resolution . . . 'never from this seat will I stir until I have attained the supreme and absolute wisdom!' he sat himself down cross legged in an unconquerable position, from which not even the descent of a hundred thunderbolts at once could have dislodged him.

"At this point the god Mara, exclaiming, 'Prince Siddhartha is desirous of passing beyond my control, but I will never allow it!' went and announced the news to his army, and sounding the Mara war-cry drew out for battle. Now Mara's army extended in front of him for twelve leagues, and to the right and to the left for twelve leagues, and in the rear as far as to the confines of the world, and it was nine leagues high,—and when it shouted it made an earthquake-like roaring and rumbling over a space of a thousand leagues. And the god Mara, mounting his elephant, which was a hundred and fifty leagues high, and had the name, 'Girded-with-Mountains,' caused a thousand arms to appear on his body, and with these he grasped a variety of weapons. Also, in the remainder of that army no two persons carried the same weapon; and diverse also in their appearances and countenances, the host swept on like a flood to overwhelm the Great Being."

The sculptor, in representing this great scene, used the tradition that no two assailants were armed with the same weapon. One has an axe, another a stone, another a bow and arrow, and so on, while some are



Death of Buddha or Achievement of Final Nirvana

Sculpture from Gandhara, 1st to 5th Century A. D.

apparently fighting from underneath. Above are the carnal lusts with hands in the attitude of prayer. There is a certain richness in the general effect of this piece. The story is told well, but unfortunately the stone has been injured. The moment chosen is when the demons of the host are making their fiercest attack. All night long the struggle went on. Finally —

"The followers of Mara began hurling immense mountain-craggs, saying: 'This will make him get up from his seat and flee.' But the Great Being kept his thoughts on the Ten Perfections, and the crags also became wreaths of flowers, and then fell to the ground. . . . Then the hundred and fifty league high elephant 'Girded-with-Mountains' fell upon his knees before the Great Being. And the followers of Mara fled away in all directions. No two went the same way."

The death of Buddha is represented in a way that recalls the pictures of the death of the Virgin or the death of St. Francis in Italian Art.

Buddha, with a halo, is lying on his right side. Around him are the mourners, among them several figures which usually recur in the Gāndhāra representations of this subject, and evidently with a special significance. A much-discussed figure, holding an implement that might be an adaptation of Zeus's thunderbolt, probably Vajrapāni, the bearer of the Vajra, standing at the head of the dying Buddha, is here the chief mourner. The naked figure that is usually beside the Vajrapāni, whose significance is not understood, is not easy to identify in this relief on account of imperfect preservation. There are, however, two or three half-draped figures. One of the twin Sāla trees, under which the Blessed One died, can be identified. At the foot of the couch is the usual robed figure, perhaps representing the faithful attendant, the venerable Ananda; and the figure in front on the ground, seated beside the tripod water cooler, is probably "Subhadda, the wandering ascetic," who came to consult the Buddha just before he died. There is also a second priest, with his head in his hands, overcome with grief. Another figure behind the couch has his hands raised as if in sorrow. Among these mourning figures lies the Enlightened One himself.

"Be so good, Ananda, as to spread me a couch with its head to the North between twin Sāla trees. I am weary, Ananda, and wish to lie down."

Subhadda, the wandering ascetic, came and was admitted into the order by the dying Buddha. After this the Blessed One made a short address to the priests and passed into the first trance, then into the second trance, and at last, after passing through the realms of the infinity of consciousness and of nothingness and other realms, arrived at the cessation of perception and sensation.

"Thereupon the Venerable Ananda spoke to the Venerable Anuruddha as follows:

"Reverend Anuruddha, the Blessed One has passed into Nirvana."

"Nay, Brother Ananda, the Blessed One has not passed into Nirvana; he has arrived at the cessation of perception and sensation!"

"Thereupon the Blessed One, rising from the cessation of his perception and sensation, entered again successively the four realms, and then he went twice through the four trances; and rising from the fourth trance immediately the Blessed One passed into Nirvana."

The third of the larger reliefs is decorative and handsome, suggesting mediaeval work in general effect. The same scene is repeated several times. In the centre are three panels representing apparently Buddha, with a halo, teaching four disciples, perhaps the so-called "Conversion Scene." To the left are seven niches. Buddha, much smaller, is there seated with his hands folded and with a halo. To the right are five niches, somewhat larger than those to the left. In each are two figures, probably holy men discussing Buddhist doctrines.

These figures are set in an architectural framing. On the right is a formal diamond-shaped design, on the left an ornamented floral pattern, and beside the figures in the central panel are columns with capitals suggesting the Corinthian order.

The other three pieces are smaller fragments. One of them is a piece of a composition similar to the last mentioned. Another is of a bird on the bough of a tree. The third, a curious representation of a young man holding a bowl before the mouth of a lion, is carved in the round and is very badly modelled. The workmanship of this fragment looks cruder and earlier than that of the others. It may possibly be the arm-piece of a throne or chair from a piece of sculpture of the earlier Indian style.

In his *History of Architecture*, Ferguson says it would be interesting to investigate

"whether the Greeks were not the first who taught the Indians idolatry. There is no trace of images in the Vedas or in the laws of Manu, or any of the older books or traditions of the Hindus. There is as little trace of any image of Buddha or Buddhist figures being set up for worship before the Christian era, or for a century after it. But the earliest, the finest, and the most essentially classical figures of Buddha are to be found in Gāndhāra."

On the other hand, Mr. Kakuzo Okakura writes that a

"deeper and better informed study of the works of Gāndhāra itself will reveal a greater prominence of Chinese than of the so-called Greek characteristics."

Buddha's faith, originally so pure and noble, beginning as a philosophy rather than a religion, could not at first reach the hearts of the multitude. But when a religion of ritual was formed in which had been incorporated the ancient Hindu gods, there converged on the thought and the art of upper India the differing streams from Greece, Rome, China, Manchuria, and Nazareth, and very likely from other sources also. These swept through the great channel which Alexander had opened, and through the routes from the northeast, and were led together in the region of which Gāndhāra was the centre.

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